

WE CLAIM:

1. A method of providing a precursor which comprises an imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition on a substrate, wherein the method comprises a heat treatment step applied to the precursor, the heat treatment step taking place under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor during the heat treatment.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the polymeric composition is positive working.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the polymeric composition includes a polymer having hydroxyl groups.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein the polymeric composition includes a polymer selected from a phenolic resin and a poly(hydroxystyrene) resin.

5. The method of claim 3, wherein the polymeric composition includes a novolak resin.

6. The method of claim 3, wherein the glass transition temperature of the coating is not exceeded in the heat treatment.

1 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the precursor is held at an elevated  
2 temperature, for at least 12 hours in the heat treatment.

1 8. The method of claim 5, wherein the precursor is held at an elevated  
2 temperature in the range 40-90°C during the heat treatment.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the method is applied to a precursor coil.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the method is applied to a stack of at least  
100 precursors.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the removal of moisture is inhibited by  
wrapping or encasing the precursor in a substantially water-impermeable material.

1 12. The method of claim 1, wherein the removal of moisture is inhibited by  
2 carrying out of the heat treatment in an environment having elevated moisture content.

1 13. The method of claim 1, wherein the coating is such that its solubility in a  
2 developer is not increased by incident UV radiation.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein said coating is such that it may be patternwise imaged by direct heat; or by charged particle radiation or electromagnetic radiation, in the latter cases said radiation being converted to heat by the coating.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein the coating comprises a radiation-absorbing compound able to absorb electromagnetic radiation entirely or predominantly in the range 600 to 1400 nm and convert it to heat.

16. The method of claim 1 wherein the coating comprises insolubilizer means which acts to inhibit the dissolution of the coating in a developer prior to imaging.

17. A method for providing a printing form precursor, comprising: (a) providing an imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition on a substrate; and (b) applying a heat treatment step to the precursor, the heat treatment step taking place under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor during the heat treatment.

18. A method for providing an electronic part precursor, comprising (a) providing an imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition on a substrate; and (b) applying a heat treatment step to the precursor, the heat treatment step taking place under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor during the heat treatment.

1 19. A positive working lithographic printing form precursor produced by a  
 2 method comprising: (a) providing an imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition on a  
 3 substrate; (b) applying a heat treatment step to the precursor, the heat treatment step taking place  
 4 under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor during the heat treatment.

1 20. A positive working electronic part precursor produced by a method  
 2 comprising: (a) providing an imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition on a substrate;  
 3 and (b) applying a heat treatment step to the precursor, the heat treatment step taking place under  
 4 conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor during the heat treatment.

1 21. A method of producing an imaged article, comprising:  
 2 (a) providing a precursor having an imageable coating which comprises a  
 3 polymeric composition on a substrate, wherein heat treatment has been applied to the precursor such  
 4 that the removal of moisture from the precursor during the heat treatment is inhibited;  
 5 (b) imagewise exposing the coating; and  
 6 (c) contacting the exposed coating with an aqueous developer.

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